

Paul P. Harris

The Founder of Rotary

(1868-1947)



Paul P. Harris, a lawyer, was the **founder of Rotary**, the world's first and most international service club. Rotary is an organization of business and professional leaders united worldwide to provide humanitarian service, promote high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build goodwill and peace in the world.

Born in Racine, Wisconsin, U.S.A. on 19 April 1868, Paul was the second of six children born to George N. Harris and Cornelia Brian Harris. At age 3 he moved to Wallingford, Vermont where he grew up in the care of his paternal grandparents. Married to Jean Thomas Harris (1881-1963), they had no children. He received an LL.B. from the University of Iowa and received an honorary LL.D. from the University of Vermont.

In 1896, he went to Chicago to practice law. One evening Paul went with a professional friend to his suburban home. After dinner, as they strolled through the neighborhood, Paul's friend introduced him to various tradesmen in their stores. This reminded Paul of his New England village and it occurred to him, "Why not have a fellowship composed of businessmen from different occupations, without restrictions of politics or religion?"

On 23 February 1905, Paul Harris formed the first Rotary Club with three other businessmen: Silvester Schiele, a coal merchant, Gustavus Loehr, a mining engineer, and Hiram Shorey, a merchant tailor. Paul Harris named the new club "Rotary" because members met in rotation at their various places of business. When Paul Harris became president of the club in its third year, he was convinced that the Rotary club could be developed into an important service movement and strove to extend Rotary to other cities.

The second Rotary club was founded in San Francisco in 1908. In August, 1910, when there were 16 clubs, the National Association of Rotary Clubs was organized. Clubs formed in Canada and Great Britain as well, and in 1912, the name was changed to the International Association of Rotary Clubs. It was then shortened to Rotary International in 1922.

When President emeritus Paul Harris passed away on 27 January 1947, his dream had grown from an informal meeting of four men to some 6,000 Rotary clubs developed for the purpose of service and fellowship.